Within the Sacred Precincts of Diplomacy

By GEORGE A. SCHREINER

This is one of several stories by Mr. Schreiner based on his experiences as an Associated Press correspondent.

APRIL 5, about 10 in the morning, the newspaperman was called up by the foreign office. He was to report immediately. A matter of the gravest aspect was to be discussed with him.

There wasn't anything new in what transpired. The Austro-Hungarian Government was about to sever diplomatic relations with the United States. On the preceding Monday that had been definitely nailed to the mast of the Central Powers. Already in January, when the resumption of the extended submarine warfare was decided upon, that program had been adopted. If Mr. Wilson went the limit after sending home Count Bernstorff, Vienna was to give Mr. Penfield his passports, and that was to be the end of it, come what might.

Emperor Charles was not enthusiatic at all. Another trip to headquarters in France, on March 31, was necessary to get his wobbly mind used to the idea. The young man was one of those who feel that something radical is about to be done, object against it instinctively, but lack withal the courage to defend what is then called their opinion by them. On the following day, he had been won over, if that phrase expresses anything in connection with a mentality as unripe as that of the young man at the head of the monarchy.

Now, the thing was to be done. The newspaperman was to inform the ambassador of the coming event, just to take off the raw edge of the job. He was informed at the same time that within 24 hours, no American would be able to send a telegram out of the country, to which was added the advice to write meanwhile what could be written, dismissal of ambassador and all. However, the important thing was to prepare the embassy for the shock. They recalled just then that Mr. Penfield had been a very good friend of theirs, until he thought it best not to be that. But he was to leave with the assurance that the Viennese did not think any the less of him, just because another item was being added to the list of belligerents and diplomatic ruptures.

The Ambassador Is Excited

THE newspaperman called at the embassy and found that the ambassador might be located in any part of the capital. He was paying his farewell calls, and there was no telling when he could be located. Word was left at the chancery, and then the newspaperman decided to take the public into his confidence. From about 11:30 a. m. to 4 p. m. copy was turned out at a rate that would be dismay to the man who had to pay the cable tolls.

There was to be a tea at the ambassadorial residence at 5—a sort of see-you-again-soon gathering. When the newspaperman arrived, most of the invited were present, among them Mesdames Penfield, Hugh R. Wilson, another lady, and a princess of the House of Parma-Bourbon, sister-in-law of the emperor, who was complaining that her relative by marriage was very impartial when it came to applying the regulations of food distribution. The stronger sex was represented by Joseph Grew, Hugh R. Wilson, Allen W. Dulles, a relative of Mr. Lansing, and two others, with Mr. Penfield still absent.

The conversation was typically diplomatic. Though the war was being extended in all directions now, those at tea did not touch on that subject, of course!

Suddenly the large double door of the room was thrown open. From behind the tall form of the gorgeously liveried servant stepped the ambassador. He seemed a little excited. He wanted the newspaperman to step into the hall immediately. The usual forms of polite social intercourse were neglected by the ambassador. Messrs. Grew, Wilson and Dulles thought it well, therefore, to follow the newspaperman.

What the ambassador wanted to have done, as quickly as possible, was this: The newspaperman was to rush off to the foreign office, with the ambassador's objection to being sent out of the country with his passports. He did not want to be put out like any canine. It would be best to let him depart as announced—for a vacation. What happened after that would be no concern of his.

The newspaperman could not see himself in the rôle of diplomatic intermediary, and said so. The secretaries of the embassy thereupon began to support their chief, and the end of the scene was that the newspaperman rushed off to the *Ballhausplatz*. By 9 o'clock that evening it had been decided that the American ambassador would not get his passports, no matter what steps Mr. Wilson might take on the morrow, but that he would be allowed to depart as a diplomatist leaving the country on his own initiative.

As the Train Pulled Out

THUS it came to pass that Mr. Penfield did not leave Vienna until Saturday night. He did that by means of a special car put at his disposal by the government. There was quite a crowd at the station, despite the drizzling rain.

The whole proceeding was regular, of course. Everybody who attended the leave-taking of the ambassador on vacation had put on funeral raiment—silk hat, dark cravat, Prince Albert, striped trousers with the stripes not too loud, patent leathers, gray gloves and other appropriate fittings, most of them dating back to the funeral of old Francis Joseph.

The court and the foreign office were represented by Counts Colloredo-Mannsfeld, Hoeveshi and Forgatch. There were large bouquets of flowers and tender words of appreciation and *au revoir*. The embassy staff was there *en masse*. The station master had put on his best bib and tucker, and the conductor of the train had polished up his exterior.

The marionette that was enacted was very interesting. The public was convinced that Mr. Wilson had decided on war with Germany, but it still hoped that it would not hit by that wholly expected development. The newspapers had to keep up that delusion, and next morning they said just enough to keep up the comedy.

The play at the leave-taking was perfect, and when it was over, the newspaperman, now cut off from home and exacting managers, went with a friend to the Gruenen Anker and philosophized a bit over a bottle of Italian champagne, bought by the friend. Meanwhile, the ambassador was speeding off toward Switzerland and safety. After all, the mission of Count Tarnowski had been in vain; he could not even serve now as hostage for the American ambassador in Vienna.

One of the mistakes constantly attributed to Mr. Wilson was that he thought himself smarter than most other men. There is no doubt that he was successful in this with the Germans. The Austro-Hungarians insist he never was able to fool them. The newspaperman had the honor of being somewhat of an intimate of Count Tisza. Already in the spring of 1916, the Hungarian premier was certain that Mr. Wilson would not allow the Central Powers to win the war. On the occasion of an interview, on February 26, 1916, at 2 p. m., Count Tisza expressed himself to that effect, and was so emphatic that the interview resulted in nothing more than this one quotation:

"For the United States to engage in the European war would be a crime against humanity!"

We will learn within the next few years how well founded were the views of this able statesman.

It was felt by the Central Powers that Mr. Wilson could have ended the war in December, 1916. Count Tisza had finally prevailed on Berlin to accept his view, and the belief of the Central Powers was that had Mr. Wilson shown the least inclination to support the peace feelers of those powers the war would have been ended. But that is another story.

Reduced to arriving at conclusions by inspection of the evidence, unable to get a single report from the *chargé d'affaires* in Washington without submitting it to the scrutiny of the State Department, the Vienna ministry of the exterior had been unable to do more than play a game of blind man's buff. Now, however, the situation was clearer. The Austro-Hungarian Government believed it had been tricked into sending an ambassador to Washington. That functionary was not wanted, and to even matters up the State Department decided to recall Mr. Penfield, without saying that much. Such was the non-secret diplomacy of Mr. Wilson. By the middle of March Mr. Wilson had made up his mind as to the date on which war should begin, and long before that every note of his was an ultimatum. The fervent assurances of the letter of reaccreditment of Mr. Penfield were things without meaning, the Austro-Hungarians believed. Throughout that winter, long before the submarine announcement was made, the State Department acted as its own *agent provocateur*, so much so that the Vienna foreign office, for the sake of meeting the views of Mr. Wilson, surrendered, lock, stock and barrel.

Anything to End War

MESSRS. Wilson and Lansing had discovered by that time that it was Vienna where their notes made the deepest impression. The haughty monarchy was eating humble pie with the docility of a Job. There was no way out. While in Berlin they would show the spines of the fretful porcupine now and then, the men in Vienna were ready to do everything to end the war, as long as that could be done with the integrity of government and the state left intact.

It was considered good ethics in Washington to make the most of this. In the opinion of the Austro-Hungarians the tone of the so-called *notes diplomatiques* that arrived in Vienna was that of a bully. Count Czernin declared he did his best to fathom the wishes and intentions of Mr. Wilson, but said he never succeeded. In the *Ancona* and *Persia* affairs, he simply conceded the State Department's maximum demands, and hoped that he would be spared similar humiliations in the future. Since he knew of the situation in the United States only what he could glean from the French and English newspapers, and the Reuter and Havas dispatches in the neutral press, he was constantly at a loss as to what could be done to meet the views of Mr. Wilson. He was willing to meet them, but it seemed that they did not remain in *status quo* for long. The tendency of the President was this today, and something else tomorrow, he said. Unfortunately, the count himself had but a scant knowledge of conditions in the United States, and Austria-Hungary, having never dreamed of going to war with the United States, had at her disposal at that time no men really qualified to occupy themselves with the correspondence from and to Washington.

The result was that in Vienna it was accepted all along that war between the United States and Germany would mean war with the monarchy also. Yet, in the end that was not to be, as Mr. Wilson saw it.

The newspaperman had been informed, that, while Mr. Penfield would be allowed to go on his scheduled vacation, the passports would be handed to the *chargé d'affaires*, Mr. Grew, as soon as the ambassador would be over the border. The time for that was about noon on Sunday, April 8, allowing for possible train delays.

Mr. Grew was informed of this. On Saturday, he asked the newspaperman to call at the chancery of the embassy.

The *chargé d'affaires* wanted the newspaperman to go to the foreign office and present arguments why Austria-Hungary should not sever diplomatic relations. After hearing what Mr. Grew had to say, and agreeing with him that the step would be a good one, the caller declined to serve in that capacity. It was his opinion that Mr. Grew should go himself, seeing that he was there for that purpose. The *chargé d'affaires* insisted, however. He felt that the proposal coming from him might not impress the foreign office. He had not been in Vienna long, and it was understood that he was handicapped by a totally undeserved reputation, acquired in Berlin, which had preceded him. Mr. Gerard was being interviewed by the French journalists once every day at least, and Mr. Grew, having been his first secretary of embassy, felt that his own standing had suffered greatly as the result.

All of which was indeed in keeping with the facts. The foreign office had ceased to trust the American diplomatists, with the exception of Rutherford Bingham and Glenn Stewart, both secretaries of embassy and without executive function. Mr. Grew was looked upon in Vienna with suspicion. His connection with the banking family of J. P. Morgan was being used there to show that he could not be other than a member of the war clique in New York and Washington. His sudden appearance in Vienna, moreover, had made a most unpleasant impression. One may gain an inkling of the tact of the State Department by its sending the first lieutenant of Mr. Gerard to Vienna to be the first aide and successor to Mr. Penfield. Of pitch-fork diplomacy that was the worst example.

Wins Foreign Office Over

MR. GREW felt all that and persisted in his intention to have the newspaperman take up such negotiations as might be entered into. Before the latter consented to do that, he ascertained that it was now the policy of the State Department to maintain diplomatic relations with Austria-Hungary, to have these relations serve "as a bridge over which relations with Germany could be resumed later." That sounded encouraging. The newspaperman sped off to the foreign office and argued busily.

Since diplomatists do not have the habit of taking the public into their confidence, they were not taken into the newspaperman's confidence. It is not often that the poor scribe gets the bulge on the real makers of international relations. Suffice the statement that after hours of labor it was decided to go on with the program.

The Vienna Government was willing to continue diplomatic relations with the United States, but it could not do it so long as the presence of an American embassy in Vienna could be construed into a tacit understanding between Vienna and Washington that soon or late there would be an end to the alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Count Czernin understood the motives of Messrs. Wilson and Lansing by now. Just why diplomatic relations between the two countries were to be continued was as clear to him as anything could be. The United States embassy at Vienna was to serve as the means by which the Allied and Associated governments wanted to separate Austria-Hungary from Germany and the Allies in the Balkans.

When the newspaperman said something about Vienna being the bridge over which relations were to be resumed with Germany, the men smiled wanly. The newspaperman pressed the point, and, as the result of this, was shown a part of the American embassy and consular correspondence that had been intercepted on its way through the public mails. The collection contained some very interesting documents. Several of the United States consuls within the monarchy had been entirely too unneutral. It was shown that the embassy mail pouch had been used for purposes not included in the list of diplomatic privileges.

Passports Handed to Grew

THERE was little to say after that. Next noon, on Easter Sunday, another funeral party waited on Mr. Grew, at the Hotel Bristol, and handed him the passports of the mission. The poor street car service had delayed the newspaperman. As he went up in one elevator, the callers descended in the other. When Mr. Grew was seen, he was standing in the middle of his parlor, his coat off and somewhat at a loss for words.

"They've just gone!" was all he could say.

"It's to be kept from the public until Tuesday, you know," said the newspaperman.

Six days later, the embassy staff left the country, in two cars attached to the Vienna-Feldkirch night train. In Berne the newspaperman tried once more to get the news before the public via Paris. The "association" having been accomplished, the French censors deleted the dispatches only in part, leaving it for the Associated Press to suppress the remainder, after a consultation with the State Department.

The last thing the newspaperman brought out of Vienna was the assurance of the emperor that he would never consent to a declaration of war against the United States. Count Czernin was one with the young ruler on that. It was the only thing the men had still in common, for under the prompting of Empress Zita the emperor had already established a liaison with the French Government through Prince Sixtus, of Parma-Bourbon, whom the newspaperman trailed across Switzerland and into France, to lose track of him there.

Of course, this part of the story of the Great War will make strange reading to a public that has been told something entirely different. More could be said, but this seems enough for the time being.